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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BASRAH 000114

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SUBJECT: SECURITY SITUATION IN MAYSAN

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CLASSIFIED BY: Ken Gross, Regional Coordinator, REO Basrah,  
Department of State.  
REASON: 1.4 (b)

¶1. Summary: On June 28 the Regional Coordinator (RC) and Poloff met with the Commander of the 4th Brigade of the Iraqi Army (IA), Commander of the Department of Border Enforcement (DBE) and Chief of Police in Maysan province. All three men grumbled about the lack of heavy weaponry their forces possess vis-à-vis militia forces and tribes. And they all agreed that without better weapons and equipment, they could not maintain adequate security in the province against the threats posed by militia units and tribal in-fighting. The chief of police said that he could not support the transfer of security control from British military forces to Iraqi security forces until the militias were disarmed. End summary.

¶2. (C) On June 28, the RC and Poloff traveled to Maysan province and met with Brigadier Abdul Hussain, Commander of the Iraqi Army's 4th Brigade, Brigadier Mokhaled Aysa Kadem, DBE Commander in Maysan, and Ismail Arrar al-Majidi (Abu Maythem), the Chief of Police. Discussions centered on the current security environment in Maysan as well as readiness for transfer of security responsibilities to Provincial Iraqi Control.

THE TROUBLEMAKERS: TRIBES AND MILITIAS

¶3. (C) Brigadier Hussain said that the largest concern for the IA is trying to keep the militias in check and fighting among the tribes. He lamented that the both the tribes and the militia "outgun" the IA and requested that heavy weapons, more training and additional troops be provided to the IA to allow it to provide proper security to the province. He complained that the militias and tribes have much heavier weaponry than the IA, and the IA cannot therefore intervene effectively when tribes clash or the militias carry out operations. (Note: An illustrative example occurred during the meeting when a report came in that two quarreling tribes had gathered in Al Amarrah. The Brigadier immediately dispatched two companies to the site, but voiced concerns that the IA's lack of firepower might keep it on the sideline as the tribes fought it out on the streets. A later report, however, said that the dispute had been diffused for the moment. End Note.)

MAYSAN PROVINCE COULD BE LIKE SWITZERLAND?

¶4. (C) On the prospect of the UK military withdrawing from Maysan, Brigadier Hussain pointed out that security problems would remain once the British forces left. Most of the problems, he said, must be resolved by force. He said that the IA needs heavier firepower, more troops and better training

before he could give a "green light" to Iraqi forces taking over security responsibilities. The militias, particularly JAM, are the main security threat in Maysan, but Brigadier Hussain said that if this thorny problem could be solved, Maysan would be a very stable province, "like Switzerland." To eliminate militias and their influence, he said that the Ministry of Defense should be put in charge of the campaign and should receive solid support from everyone in Baghdad.

#### VIEW OF THE POLICE

15. (C) Police Chief Abu Maythem cited the role of militias in Maysan as his most challenging problem. (Note: Abu Maythem was a Badr Corps commander famous in Maysan for liberating the province from Saddam before Coalition Forces arrived. See Reftel for more on him. End Note.) Like his colleagues in the IA and the DBE, the absence of heavy weapons and equipment are the major internal problems he faces, though he also said that almost half of his 10,000-man police force has no weapons. (Note: the British officer commanding in Maysan said that the police do not have weapons for the additional officers since the authorized number of police is just over 5,000. End Note.) The police chief said that he is confident that his force is under his control.

16. (C) Abu Maythem said that the UK military should remain in the province as long as there are heavily armed militia units. He averred that he would arrest any armed militia in Maysan, but JAM is the major problem. Abu Maythem said that he has tried to solve the militia problem politically, but has been unsuccessful because of Governor Adil Mahudir Rahdi al-Maliki's interference. Battles between the police and JAM occur frequently, and Abu Maythem placed the blame for this squarely on the support JAM receives from the governor and members of the Provincial Council. Tribal disputes are also a problem for the police, and Abu Maythem said that the police need heavier weapons to better control them. He uses his influence to sort out disputes among tribes with the leaders themselves, and, for the most part, believes he is successful.

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#### BORDER CONTROL

17. (C) Brigadier Kadem commands the DBE in Maysan, a force of 1,705 men who patrol the 275-kilometer border with Iran and man 28 forts spread out approximately 5-15 kilometers along the border. He also complained about the lack of heavy weapons and equipment and the influence of militias and tribes. In particular, the DBE does not have communications equipment that would allow communication among forts, a necessity for border enforcement units to be effective. Brigadier Kadem said that drugs and weapons are smuggled across the border, but not in significant numbers. Appliances are most frequently brought in to Iraq and to Iran by illegal methods, with liquor being a popular smuggling item into Iran. The border area in the south of Maysan, the marsh area, is the most difficult area to control and monitor. According to Brigadier Kadem, there is no relationship or contact between the DBE and Iranian border enforcement elements.

#### COMMENT

18. (C) Comment: Maysan province is predominantly Shia (99 percent) and its population is strongly tribal in nature. Tribal customs and laws frequently trump secular laws in the province, and there is a great deal of tension between the Office of the Martyr Sadr (OMS) and Badr organization entities. OMS elements hold 15 of the 41 seats on the Maysan Provincial Council, and the Governor is a strong OMS supporter. Abu Maythem is a former member of Badr (his assertion), and much of the police force is made up of Badr members. The heightened sense of tension between the OMS and Badr has led to numerous conflicts in the past few years. High unemployment in the province makes recruitment easy for the militias. (Note: For further background information on Maysan province, see reftel.

End note.)

19. (C) Comment continued: With well-organized and heavily armed tribes and militia in Maysan, all three of the security professionals cited the need for better weaponry as their main concern before security control could be returned to the Iraqis.

The British Commander at Camp Abu Naji noted that this is a constant refrain that he hears from them and said that the IA will receive some of the items on its wish list. Tribal fighting is historical and endemic to the area and will never disappear, and all the security chiefs believe that the British military forces serve as a lightening rod for JAM attacks. But JAM wields significant power in Maysan and is able to outgun the security forces if they have to go it alone without the British.

As Brigadier Kadem pointed out when the discussion turned to Muthanna Province reverting to Iraqi security control, Muthanna does not share a long border with Iran and "does not have political parties supported by neighboring countries." End Comment.

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